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mount pulaski courthouse

STATE MEMORIAL

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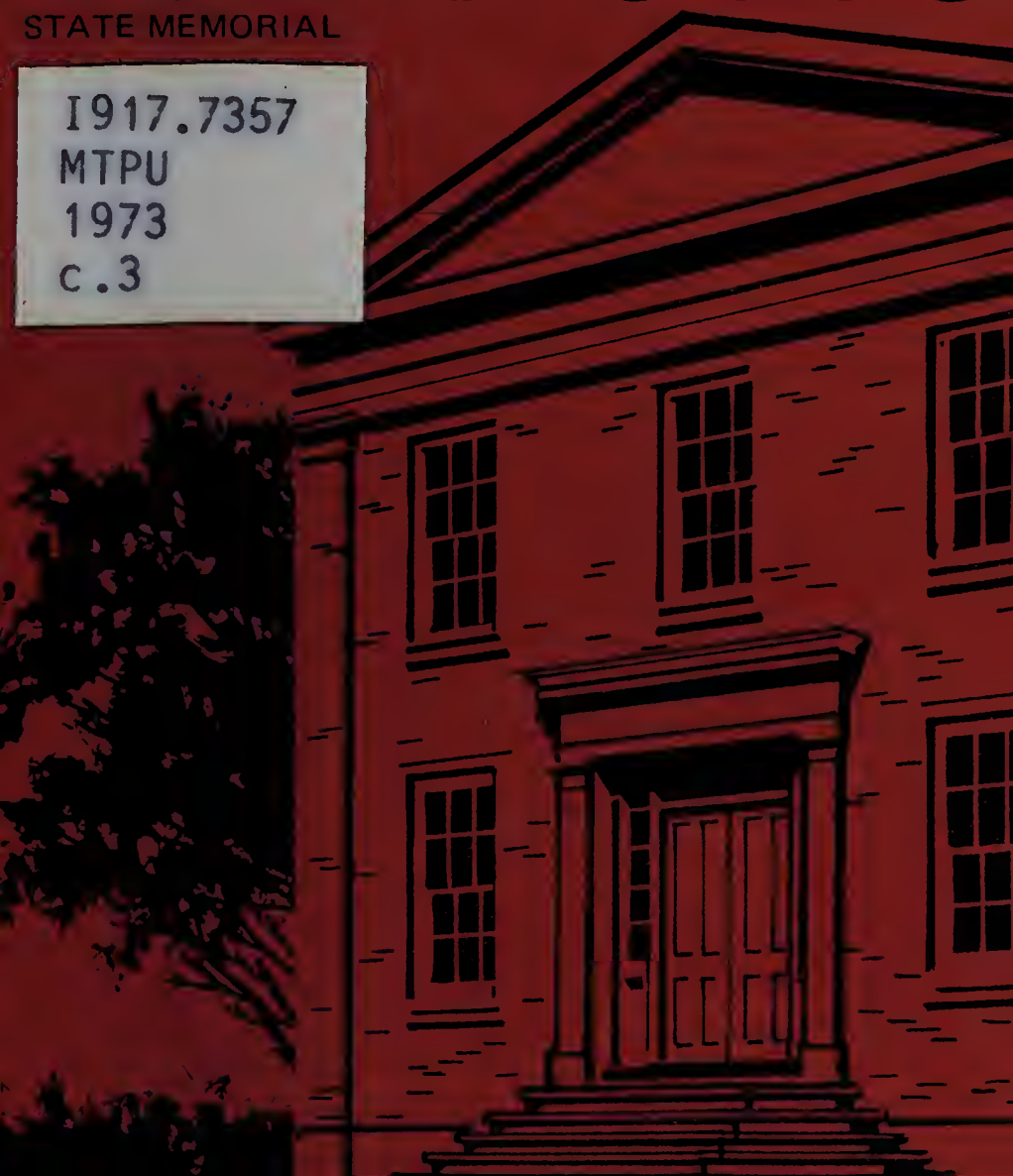

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THE COURTHOUSE

Mt. Pulaski Courthouse is a two-story brick building, standing today as it did in Lincoln's time. The courthouse is an excellent example of Greek revival architecture as found in Illinois.

The first Logan County courthouse was at Postville now in the southwest part of Lincoln. The Postville Courthouse was purchased in 1929 by Henry Ford and stands in Greenfield Village at Dearborn, Michigan. The state has reproduced this building on its original site where it stands as a state memorial.

Court sessions were held in Postville between 1840 and 1848. In 1847 the booming town of Mt. Pulaski, named for Count Casimir Pulaski of Revolutionary War fame, offered a business

Courthouse in use as a schoolhouse, c. 1865.

block and a new building as an inducement to move the county seat. The Mt. Pulaski backers won the resulting election. To build the courthouse, the citizens raised $2,700 which was supplemented by a county appropriation of $300.

The courthouse served the county until 1853 when the county seat, by legislation, was moved to Lincoln. This thriving new community was named for the Springfield lawyer who was a trusted friend and attorney for the town's founders.

RESTORATION

The Mt. Pulaski Courthouse was used as a schoolhouse until 1878, then as a city hall and jail, and finally as a post office and headquarters for various town officials. In 1936 it was acquired as a state memorial from the city of Mt. Pulaski and restoration work was begun.

In the restoration the state removed the partitions put in the building over the years thus giving it is original arrangement, took down the schoolhouse cupola and bell, and restored the front door to its original appearance.

On removing the floor on the second story the original floor was found underneath intact with the holes for the spindles used in the judge's stand. On this floor the court and juror rooms are as when the structure was built.

Gradually the historians have found furniture used in this period and once again the historic Mt. Pulaski Courthouse has the appearance it

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Lincoln Tableau relives early courthouse scene.

had in Lincoln's day, including most of the law books and the gavel used by Judge David Davis when he held court here. The jail in the basement has not been restored.

LINCOLN AT MT. PULASKI

Cradle Case: Many interesting cases were heard in the Mt. Pulaski Courthouse on the old Eighth Circuit. A famous case tried by Abraham Lincoln at Mt. Pulaski was what was known as the "horological cradle" case. The case involved the trade of an alleged patent on a cradle for a valuable tract of land.

The patent as described by Mr. Lincoln in his declaration was "a cradle, rocked by machinery, with weights running on pulleys, the cradle was the pendulum and which being wound up would rock itself until it ran down, thus saving time to mothers and nurses." Lincoln operated the cradle in open court and when Judge Davis asked, "how the thing could be stopped when desirable," Mr. Lincoln replied, "It's like some of the glib talkers you and I know, Judge, it won't stop until it runs down."

Partners: The Mt. Pulaski courtroom saw much of Lincoln who for nearly a quarter of a century rode the circuit, first as a partner of John T. Stuart, later as an associate of Stephen T. Logan and finally as a senior member of the firm of Lincoln and Herndon, a partnership later dissolved by Lincoln's assassination.

One of Mt. Pulaski's leading attorneys, Samuel C. Parks, was also associated with Lincoln. Parks gathered the cases and Lincoln joined him in the trials. Lincoln had similar associations in other counties.

THE CIRCUIT COURT SYSTEM

Illinois' circuit court system, adopted in 1839, was patterned after that of Kentucky. The state was divided into multi-county circuits, each with a judge who traveled from county to county within his jurisdiction until he completed the judicial business of each county. Court sessions sometimes lasted as long as six weeks at a county seat.

Following the same route were groups of traveling lawyers who met with their clients on courthouse lawns, under nearby trees or on the public streets. At night they gathered convivially in village inns. Some of these men had been well educated in the east, while others, like Lincoln, had little formal training. "Circuit-riding" provided a real test of an attorney's legal skill and wisdom. Attorneys of Lincoln's day served a thinly scattered population and had to ride the circuit in order to make a living.

Eighth Judicial Circuit: It was a hard life with small fees, pioneer living conditions and extensive, difficult travel. The Eighth Judicial Circuit, for example, was very large, at one time encompassing 11,000 square miles, slightly larger than the state of Maryland.

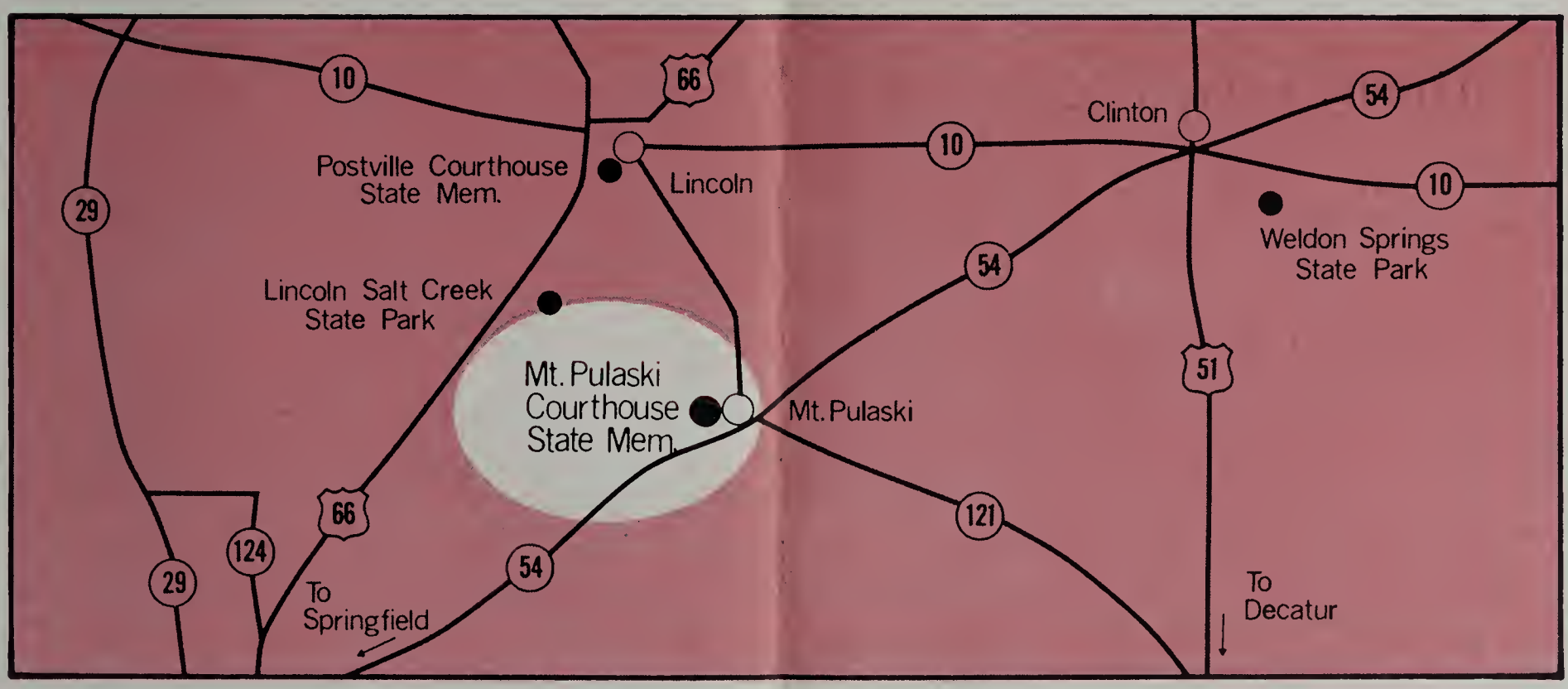
There were periodic alterations, but none of these appreciably reduced the circuit's size during the time Lincoln followed the route regularly.

Lincoln labored on the Eighth Circuit full time for a dozen years and on a part time basis for several more, but he seemed to thrive in that environment. His famous story telling sessions, the close friendships he formed and the political contacts he made in those years apparently compensated him for the weary hours of travel, the poor food and inferior lodging. Except for the two years he served in Congress, he devoted at least half of each year to circuit traveling until he became President.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION . . .

Nearby Lincoln points of interest are the Lincoln Home, the Old State Capitol and the Lincoln Tomb, all in Springfield. Other state parks and memorials involving Lincoln include Metamora Courthouse, Postville Courthouse, Vandalia Statehouse, Lincoln Log Cabin, Lincoln Salt Creek, Lincoln Trail, Lincoln Trail Homestead, Lincoln's New Salem, Lincoln Monument and Lincoln Trail Monument.

For further information concerning Illinois State Parks and Memorials write to the Department of Conservation, Division of Education, State Office Building, Springfield, 62706.



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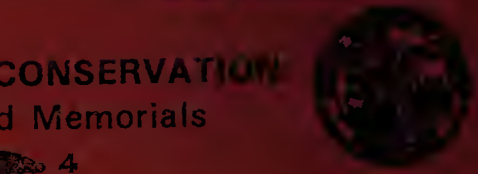

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